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AUTHOR Tipton, Leonard; And Others
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ABSTRACT

To conceptualize public opinion as something other than "mere aggregation" of individual opinions requires systemic models that identify component parts of public opinion and their structural/functional relationships. Operationalization requires asking respondents not only their individual opinion, but also their perception of public opinion, which tends to influence personal opinion. Using a model of "collective coorientation" and asking questions about proposed public lotteries and casino gambling in Florida, a study hypothesized that (1) of two issues, the one representing the less familiar change from the status quo would show more pseudoconsensus, while the one representing the more familiar change would show more pluralistic ignorance; (2) overestimation of the majority would occur in geographic areas that tend toward monolithic consensus, while underestimation of the majority would occur in areas that tend toward dissensus; and (3) readers of particular newspapers would overestimate or underestimate majority opinion in the direction of a newspaper's editorial stance on an issue. Respondents, a random sample of 666 self-identified registered voters, were surveyed by telephone during the 1986 election year. The three hypotheses were not supported. Results indicated that the field conditions under which data were gathered did not result in the ideal situations needed for clean tests in areas of interest: comparison of different collective systems and different issues, and comparisons across time. (Figures, tables of data, notes and references are appended.) (NKA)

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PUBLIC OPINION AS COLLECTIVE COORIENTATION

Leonard Tipton

Peggy Prichard

Nate Pickard

College of Journalism and Mass Communications
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Theory and Methodology Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, TX, August 1-4, 1987

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Leonard Tipton, Peggy Prichard and Nate Pickard

College of Journalism and Mass Communications
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611
904-392-6669

ABSTRACT

To conceptualize public opinion as something other than "mere aggregation" of individual opinions requires systemic models that identify component parts of public opinion and their structural/functional relationships. Operationalization requires asking respondents not only their individual opinion, but also their perception of public opinion. Several such models are reviewed and a model of "collective coorientation" is illustrated with statewide survey data from Kentucky and Florida, using questions about a public lottery in each state.

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Theory and Methodology Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, TX,. August 1-4, 1987.

PUBLIC OPINION AS COLLECTIVE COORIENTATION[1]

"A candidate need not withdraw from the race just because everyone thinks he is lying. But if everyone thinks that everyone else thinks *he is lying, he must withdraw immediately. Perception becomes reality."*[2]

INTRODUCTION

The study of public opinion faces at least two recurring conceptual difficulties. One is how to conceive of public opinion as something other than a "mere aggregation" of individual opinions. Another is how to handle the "don't knows."

Lemert (1981) defined the first problem as a reductionist one:

> For our purposes, we will treat any kind of reductionism as the attempt to explain and reconstruct social-level phenomena from individual-level data. The limits of reductionism remain an unsolved and controversial problem today among social scientists -- controversial, that is, on those rare occasions when reductionism is still discussed as a problem (p 3).

In the same vein, Hennessey (1985) noted that the problem of the don t knows is more often ducked than addressed:

> Fairness requires that pollsters describe not only their sampling design and actual sample, but the analytical assumptions and devices on which their reports or conclusions are based. For instance, the handling of the "don't know" response has always been a source of disagreement among pollsters and of confusion among the public. The "don t know" dilemma is an unsolved problem about which pollsters ought to be candid (p 91).

Public opinion polling has a long tradition of questions that ask about individual opinion, but questions that go beyond reductionism to ask about "what other people think" are relatively infrequent. Moreover, such questions may complicate the don't know dilemma by increasing non-response in ways that are difficult to interpret. Respondents may not know, may not care or may find such questions totally incomprehensible.

Merton (1957) offered a crucial distinction between collectivities and aggregates that is often cited by those who argue that public opinion must be conceptualized as a unitary whole rather than loose organizations of individual opinions. Merton defined collectivities as having members with "a sense of solidarity by virtue of sharing common values and who have acquired an attendant sense of moral obligation to fulfill role-expectations." Social categories are "aggregates of social statuses, the occupants of which are not in social interaction" (p. 299).

MODELS OF COLLECTIVE OPINION

To get beyond mere aggregation will require public opinion research to concentrate upon the systemic components of the phenomenon -- the constituent parts and their structural/functional relationships -- rather than the components of individual opinions. Among the obvious constituent elements of most conceptualizations will be "majority," "minority," and "don't know." Theory and research that deal with "public opinion <u>about</u> public opinion" (See, for example, the work of Glynn, 1984) offer insights into some structural/functional relationships. Several models have been formulated that attempt to depict such structural/functional relationships between the mix of opinion and perceptions about that mix, or what we might call meta-opinion.

<u>Scheff's model:</u> Scheff (1967) used an alphabetic shorthand to represent various states of agreement and perceived agreement in social systems. What he termed the zero order state simply asks participants individually "what do you think?" and is marked by two conditions, A for agree or D for disagree. The first order state asks "what do you think the other thinks?" and has states of U for understand or M for misunderstand the level of agreement.

Moving from interpersonal to "collective" systems is straightforward, according to Scheff: "To use a simplifed example to illustrate this approach, suppose in a survey we ask two questions: (1) Do you agree or disagree with the following statement, 'There is a God'? (2) How will the average person answer this question?" (p. 38) The patterns of answers result in four conditions, all based on the majority.

UA is "monolithic consensus." A majority of respondents agree and understand that they agree.

MA is "pluralistic ignorance." Majority agree, but misunderstand and perceive disagreement, or perceive that they individually disagree with a false perceived majority.

UD is "dissensus." There is no true majority on the issue, and a majority of respondents understand that. This is somewhat akin to Newcomb's (1957) "agree to disagree" state.

MD is "false consensus." Respondents disagree (in fact, there is no true majority), but respondents misunderstand and perceive agreement.

Taylor's model: Scheff's model is limited by its focus on the majority, excluding the minority and the don't knows. Drawing upon the concepts of spiral of silence and pluralistic ignorance research, Taylor (1982) formulated a model that explicitly takes into account the minority.

He noted that in most studies, the aggregate level of misperception is measured by comparing the true majority with the perceived majority, what he termed using aggregate measures to study individual-level dynamics. One can build in an aggregate level component by assuming that 100 percent of the population is part of a system ("lives in an area" is his term) with a true majority. Therefore, the better index is 1.0 minus the perceived majority proportion.

He offered a function rule for the perceived majority that utilizes both majority and minority explicitly:

$$P_a = P_1P_A + (1 - P_2)\ P_B$$

P_1 is the proportion in the true majority that understands its majority position; P_A is the true majority proportion; P_2 is the proportion in the true minority who perceive themselves as a majority falsely. (P_B is the true minority proportion.) Together, the terms define P_a, the proportion with an accurate perception of the true majority.

Taylor makes a critical point about the importance of the minority, but the thrust of his argument is to focus attention on individual level components. Nor does his model provide for don't know responses. He noted that the literature on pluralistic ignorance cited in his article includes the don't know/uninvolved in the base for calculating the proportion correctly perceiving the majority position. Some of the pluralistic ignorance literature, however, does have specific statements that the don't know responses were

excluded. The don't knows become a very important concern in constructing indices to compare the amount of pluralistic ignorance in various social systems or publics. As Taylor noted, excluding the uninvolved lowers the measured level of pluralistic ignorance. He himself calculated his indices as a "percent of those with informed opinions" (p. 326).

Chaffee-McLeod Coorientation Model: The basic coorientation model has been described as a Kuhnian paradigm in the social sciences that focused attention on the systemic relationships in people's interaction with each other. (Reynolds, 1971) A paradigmatic variation that schematically depicts those relationships was proposed by Chaffee and McLeod (1968). Essentially, their model has four constituent parts: A's opinion, B's opinion, A's perception of B's opinion, and B's perception of A's opinion. The model defines five structural/functional relationships: agreement between A and B, A's perceived congruency with B, B's perceived congruency with A, A's accuracy about B, and B's accuracy about A.

Several works have addressed the conceptual problems of extending coorientation beyond the intrapersonal or interpersonal levels. (McLeod, Becker and Elliot, 1972; Grunig and Stamm, 1973; Broom 1977, Lemert, 1981; Browning, 1986).

Kim's variation: Kim (1986) used the McLeod-Chaffee model to re-conceptualize Scheff's collective terms back to the interpersonal level. Kim presented a typology based on whether coorientation studies have been from a "static" or a "dynamic" perspective on one level, and on another parameter, whether they have concerned values, content or form. Kim also labeled a traditionally undefined relationship in the McLeod-Chaffee model:

> Another line may be connected between A's perception of B's orientation and B's perception of A's orientation. Similarity between these perceptions may be termed as meta-agreement or meta-understanding. However, these meta-concepts are of the first level coorientation comparing not each other's own orientations toward X but each other's perceptions of each other's orientations. They are formed by obtaining the above coorientation concepts of comparing two zero-level orientations (i.e., agreement and understanding) or of comparing a zero- and a first-level orientation (i.e., congruency and accuracy). So, the meta-concepts are excluded from our immediate concern (p. 35).

Using positive or negative terms for the coorientational relationships (agreement, accuracy and congruency), Kim presents Scheff's system states

as interpersonal states, adding two more to the four defined earlier: semi-consensus (when one party perceives more agreement than actually exists) and semi-dissensus (when one party perceives more disagreement than actually exists).

ANOTHER VARIATION

Where Kim presented the Scheff states interpersonally, we have presented them in coorientational schematics with two proportions (majority and minority) rather than two persons (Fig. 1). For the moment, we duck again the problem of the don't knows. The constituent elements (the boxed terms) are these:

Maj:X is the majority proportion on topic X
Min:X is the minority proportion on topic X
Maj:Min:X is the majority's estimate of the minority proportion
Min:Maj:X is the minority's estimate of the majority proportion

The values that go into the top boxes are straightforward, simply the majority proportion and the minority proportion as determined by survey or vote. Values for the bottom boxes depend on how the meta question is phrased. "Will most people agree or disagree with you?" makes the values become the proportions of the majority and the minority who say disagree. "Will most people favor or oppose?" makes the values the proportions of the minority who are accurate and the majority who are inaccurate. (We will return to this point when we illustrate the model with data.) Alternatively, one may ask what percentage will favor position X, in which case the values would be a measure of central tendency for majority and minority estimation separately.

The relationship term between the top two boxes is traditionally called "agreement." We have substituted Scheff's term, "pluralism," since we are dealing with majority/minority proportions rather than individual opinion. The pluralism sum is majority plus minority proportions. Where don t knows are excluded or non-existent, the sum will be 1.0. When don t knows are included in the base for calculating proportions, the sum should index the "amount" of opinion. The pluralism difference is simply majority minus minority proportions.

The relationship between the bottom elements is the one Kim labeled "meta-agreement" or "meta-understanding." That labeling is consistent with Scheff's terms for the first order state (we think we think). However, the term has some other history. Chaffee and McLeod originally used

"understanding" to mean agreement about the attributes of X. For reasons of temporary convenience, we have simply labeled it the "meta" term. (We will comment on it in the next section.)

The relationship between majority and minority perceptions of each other compared with the "true" values provides separate estimates of majority and minority accuracy. The terms are similar to Taylor's, except that his are derived from both majority and minority estimates of majority. In the field, one would probably not ask respondents to estimate the minority, but our schematic reflects traditional coorientation conceptualization.

We have deliberately not labeled the traditional "congruency" terms. The congruency terms represent the intrapersonal and interpersonal confounding noted earlier in citations of Taylor, Stamm and Kim. Moreover, given the functional dependencies of the terms, once the accuracy terms are observed or defined, then the level is congruency is fixed.

Using the collective model, we can now define and model certain pluralistic states of interest: consensus, pseudo consensus and pluralistic ignorance.

Consensus is defined as these accuracy statements: Maj:Min = Min and Min:Maj = Maj. The majority recognizes its majority position; the minority, its minority position.

Pseudo consensus is defined by accuracy statements of Maj:Min < Min and Maj:Min > Maj. The majority underestimates the minority; the minority overestimates the majority.

Pluralistic ignorance is defined by accuracy statements of Maj:Min > Min and Min:Maj < Maj. The majority overestimates the minority; the minority underestimates the majority.

We assume the level of pluralism always has a majority and a minority. Therefore, we cannot define Scheff's dissensus state. To handle states close to dissensus, one might define the terms as less than/greater than or equal to. Another possibility is to distinguish states in terms of sampling error.

ILLUSTRATION WITH DATA

To illustrate the model values, we use data from a University of Kentucky Survey Research Center statewide telephone poll conducted Oct. 15 to Oct. 26, 1984, with 743 respondents. The survey asked respondents how closely they had followed the issue of a state lottery, whether they personally

favored or opposed it and whether they thought "most people" favored or opposed it. The survey also asked whether they personally would vote for a property tax increase and whether they thought "most people in your community" would favor or oppose an increase. Table 1 presents the full question wording and response frequencies for these questions.

Figure 2 presents the coorientation schematics for the tax and lottery questions, excluding from the base the don't knows and no answers to either or both the opinion question and the meta question. On the tax issue (Fig. 2A), a majority of those with opinions opposed an increase -- 64 percent to 36 percent. The minority was precisely accurate in its estimate of the majority; the majority underestimated the true minority, guessing that only 5 percent would favor a tax increase when, in fact, 36 percent did. The state can be defined as one of majority pseudo-consensus.

Let us note where those meta proportions came from. Min:Maj:X is the proportion of the minority favoring a tax increase who guessed accurately that most people opposed. Maj:Min:X is that proportion of the majority who guessed inaccurately that "most people" favor. At the individual level, that is an inaccurate perception; at the meta-level, the fact that so few people held it represents an underestimation of the true extent of that opinion.

One problem with these tax questions is that they ask about "community," but the only accuracy test is against statewide results. The lottery questions offer a more logical accuracy test, as well as an opportunity to compare two issues. In figure 2B, the "true" majority and minority are again based on the total sample of respondents with opinions. Of that 486, 80 percent favored a lottery and 20 percent were opposed. On this issue, the majority was precisely accurate, the minority underestimated the true majority by 30 percentage points. The state can be defined as one of minority pluralistic ignorance.

Figure 3 represents an attempt to deal with don't knows. DK incidence was higher for the meta question, but unlike those in some studies (e.g., Tichenor and Wackman, 1973), most respondents ventured a guess. For these analyses, the base for "true" majority and minority becomes all respondents, including DKs on "own" opinion (but excluding no answers). Thus the pluralism relationship will not sum to 1.0. Comparing such summed relationships does offer an index of the "amount" of opinion across systems, issues or times. But it complicates both the selection of a base and an interpretation of the meta terms.

Incorporating DKs should tap something resembling Taylor's "certainty of opinion" concept. Like pluralism, the meta term in a perfectly accurate system would index the incidence of DK. However, that summed meta term is functionally related to over or underestimation of majority/minority. If the sign is included in the accuracy values, meta is 1 minus the two terms; in other words, overestimation from one side balances underestimation by the other. Unless the researcher can assume that don't know responses are not systematically related to the question itself, comparisons of different collectivities, issues or time periods should look at the entire pattern rather than a single index.

SOME OTHER ASSUMPTIONS OF COLLECTIVE COORIENTATION

Discussions of assumptions of collective coorientation generally begin with a statement that obviously collectives don't think (McLeod, Becker and Elliot, 1972; Grunig and Stamm, 1973). Instead, the assumption becomes that individuals in them share values and role expectations (Merton, 1957). Chaffee and McLeod (1972) identified three other assumptions: boundaries, psychological meaningfulness and issue relevance. Another implicit assumption is that collectivities share some means of communication.

One context that permits validation of these assumptions is voting. In that context, boundaries are defined by an agency independent of a researcher trying to structure observations. A test of "meaningfulness" -- either of the boundaries or the topic -- is how readily people can answer a survey's questions. Some phrasings seem particularly difficult -- questions about what a community thinks, what the average person thinks or questions that ask respondents to estimate statistical distributions. However, respondents do seem able and willing to estimate a vote (Glynn and McLeod,1984).

By registering, voters have also agreed to a well-defined system of shared values and role expectations. Topic relevance also becomes validated: by shared tradition, a topic is relevant if it is on the ballot.

In this set of assumptions, communication is the most arguable as well as the most interesting. We will develop this argument in the next section, but right now we note that the communication possibilities include observation of others' behavior and interpersonal discussion. The most relevant collective possibility is mediated communication, particularly reading the same newspaper (Chaffee,1977).

The voting context also allows researchers to continue to some extent finessing the problems of the don't knows. If one votes, then don't know is not an alternative. We can, with some assurance, expect that don't knows to an "own opinion" question will either not vote or that they will eventually distribute in the same proportions as those expressing a choice. (Kinder and Sears, 1985; Myer, 1987). In either case, they do not influence the "true" majority/ minority proportions. Nor is it necessary to look for shared understanding about don't knows if the meta-question is cast in terms of estimated vote.

HYPOTHESES

Coorientation's status as a model makes it a potentially useful tool for conceptualizing and measuring public opinion, but not for deriving hypotheses. To do that, we must look to other research literature. In this case, we have chosen the literature of pluralistic ignorance.

Broadly conceived, pluralistic ignorance refers to any systematic misperception of the true state of the mix of opinion. Narrowly conceived, it refers only to those situations in which a "true" majority perceives itself to be in the minority and a "true" minority perceives itself to be in the majority. That state has been observed quite often. We were able to locate few instances of studies showing pseudo-consensus, situations in which the majority underestimates the minority and the minority overestimates the majority. An exception is Korte (1972). Among a population of students, he observed a state we defined as pseudo-concensus and what he termed a "radical bias," instead of a more frequently observed "conservative bias." He also noted an "assilimation bias" much like what later studies termed the "looking glass" phenomenon.

The issue most frequently cited in pluralistic ignorance studies is racial segregation. Ample survey data demonstrates that while segregationists were occupying a minority position in the U.S. mix of public opinion, they believed that a majority of Americans espoused segregationist policies similar to their own. The "true majority" of Americans that public opinion polls showed were rejecting segregration failed to recognize their majority status (Breed and Ktsanes, 1961; Fields and Schuman, 1976; O'Gorman, 1975; 1979; O'Gorman with Garry, 1976).

Other issues in which a pattern of pluralistic ignorance has been found include pornography (Tipton and Fielder, 1978); educational policy (Long and Willower, 1980); environmental regulation (Taylor, 1982); the elderly (O'Gorman, 1980).

Conservative bias: One hypothesis invoked in the pluralistic ignorance literature to account for such patterns is that of a conservative bias (O'Gorman, 1979). Most of the studies report a systematic misperception in the direction of overestimation of support for a conventionally defined conservative position.

We might expect to observe more states of pseudo-consensus if the conservative bias is formulated in the more classical sense of resistance to change (Moore and Tumin, 1949). The argument goes something like this: in the absence of public argument, most people will assume that because a status quo encompasses a certain public policy or stance -- for example, segregation, prohibition, blue laws -- a majority of citizens must support it. Public experience based on consideration of a change -- for instance referenda or candidates who espouse change, whether or not they win -- lessen resistance rooted in ignorance of alternatives.

Based on that rationale, we advance this hypothesis:

H1: Of two issues, the one representing the less familiar change from the status quo will show more pseudo-consensus; the one representing the more familiar change will show more pluralistic ignorance.

Projection vs observation: Another hypothesis from the pluralistic ignorance literature concerns what some studies have termed "projection" or "assimiliation bias" and others the "looking glass" phenomenon. Fields and Schuman (1976) described it this way: "People appear to look out into the world and somehow see their own opinions reflected back." (p 437). Fields and Schuman noted that the looking glass phenomenon may itself reflect a generalized personality trait, though they see it as much more pervasive social trait than an individual differences concept.

Though he did not hypothesize in "looking glass" terms, O'Gorman (1975, 1979;) pitted shared cultural values against social structure status locators to account for what he termed "collective images." His evidence generally favored shared values. In the context of the looking glass, O'Gorman noted directional evidence to support the notion that people do project shared values. He defined shared values as "related to the knowledge that participants have of their own culture" (1979, p. 49).

It is difficult to see how projection alone could account for the classical patterns of pluralistic ignorance identified above. Were projection that pervasive, the majority would show awareness of its dominant status. It is

easier to account for that pattern if knowledge of culture is based on observation of others' behavior rather than projection alone. O'Gorman used measures of behavior and observation as well as pure opinion measures. He tapped behavior and observation with questions that asked respondents to characterize the racial composition of their friends, neighborhood and places where they worked and shopped. These measures appeared to be at least as equally predictive as the personal values questions, although the way the presented data were aggregated and indexed makes explicit comparisons difficult.

Related to the conservative bias, part of our observation or our knowledge of our culture also stems from knowing what "the law" is. Another possibility for assessing others' opinion is interpersonal discussion (see, for example, Glynn, 1984). Yet there are numerous "politeness" constraints upon that discussion, particularly in areas of disagreement. In the absence of hearing articulated views on issues, one must fall back on observations of behavior to infer opinions. The point is not that we share values, or project values, but that we observe a restricted range of behaviors in the people around us.

Based on that rationale, we advance this hypothesis:

H2: Overestimation of the majority will occur in geographic areas that tend toward monolithic consensus. Underestimation of the majority will occur in areas that tend toward dissensus.

Media observations. While the pluralistic ignorance literature has only infrequently addressed the mass media role as a source of knowledge of the status of public opinion, that role does form a crucial part of a related literature -- the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974, 1975, 1979; Salmon and Kline, 1983). Here the argument goes that most of us see the state of public opinion as reflected in mass media as a supplement to limited personal observation. There is evidence that newspapers support the status quo and overestimate the degree of public conservatism (Entman and Paletz, 1980). Allport (1937), to whom pluralistic ignorance traces its roots, wrote of a "circularity of reinforcement." The newspaper editor presents a version of the status quo that largely reflects the view of governing authority. This serves both to legitimize the views of authority and strengthen the perception of predominant opinion among readers. Allport was emphasizing reinforcement of the validity of the editorial voice, but at the same time the circularity strengthens the confidence of both the authority and the holders of the predominant opinion as portrayed in the media.

From this line of argument, we advance this hypothesis:

H3: Readers of particular newspapers will overestimate or underestimate majority opinion in the direction of a newspaper's editorial stance on an issue.

METHODOLOGY[3]

Data for this study came from a statewide phone survey of 666 self-identified registered voters conducted in Florida Oct. 15-20, 1986, by the Communication Research Center of the University of Florida. This survey was part of a larger project involving three statewide and three countywide surveys in May, August and October. Reflecting a Florida election year context, a major portion of each survey concerned political topics, particularly the referenda issues of casino gambling and a state lottery. Each interview included about 60 questions and lasted about 15 minutes. Paid student interviewers completed a two-hour training session in screening procedures and interviewing techniques. The random-digit-dialing telephone sample was purchased from Survey Sampling, Inc. Data for this paper was drawn from questions that asked respondents if they favored a state lottery; if they favored casino gambling, and asked them to guess what percentage of the voters would favor upcoming referenda permitting lotteries and casinos in the state. Table 2 presents the question wording and response frequencies for those questions.

The hypotheses as stated called for comparisons across collectivities or systems. For the "status quo" hypotheses, the lottery issue was considered to represent the lesser change, because it had been an issue longer and had actually appeared on an earlier referendum ballot. For the "geographic" hypotheses, telephone area code was used as a measure of different geographic areas.

For the newspaper hypotheses, we clipped editorial endorsements from all state newspapers mentioned by respondents and coded them as being either pro or anti lottery and pro or anti casino. If we could not obtain a copy of the editorial, we called the newspaper editorial department to ask about the endorsement. The survey asked, "What newspapers, if any, do you subscribe to?" Respondents were treated as belonging to that newspaper group if they named a particular newspaper, regardless of what other newspapers they said they read. Readers of newspapers that did not endorse or whose editorials did not contain a specific recommendation on how to vote were excluded.

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

The first hypothesis was framed as a comparison of two issues -- in this case the referenda on lotteries and casinos. Although approval of either would have represented a change from the status quo, favoring the lottery was operationally defined as representing the lesser change for purposes of testing this hypothesis.

In the Florida election, the lottery was approved by a 61 to 39 percent margin. The casino issue was defeated, 68 to 32 percent. Survey results on the amount of support for the two issues, while within sampling error, overestimated support for the lottery by 3 percent and underestimated opposition to casinos by the same margin (using as a base only "yes/no" and excluding don't know or no answer). As the test for coorientation accuracy, actual election results, rather than survey results, were chosen as the "true" standard. The meta values are the mean vote estimates of majority and minority separately. Only 5 to 6 percent could not or would not make such estimates. The survey question asked respondents to estimate the pro vote. So the value for the pro-lottery majority's estimate of minority and the pro-casino minority's estimate of majority was actually 1 minus the mean.

Figure 4 presents the coorientation diagrams for the two issues statewide, using as a base only those with opinions on both the "own opinion" and "meta" questions. Contrary to the hypotheses, both issues show a state of pluralistic ignorance. It was hypothesized that the casino issue would show a state of pseudo-consensus. For both issues, the minority (those opposed to the lottery and those in favor of casinos) had more to do with total inaccuracy in the system than did the majority. The differences in magnitude of minority inaccuracy on the two issues is in the direction of the hypothesis. However, the two majority accuracy values are almost identical and not in the hypothesized direction. The hypothesis as stated for comparing two issues is not supported.

The second hypothesis concerned expected coorientational patterns in geographic areas where patterns of support and opposition differ. In actuality, the patterns themselves did not differ much across geographic areas, although the degree of difference between majority and minority did. In South Florida, support for the lottery was highest -- 76 percent for and 24 percent against. In Central Florida, 57 percent voted for the lottery; in North Florida, 53 percent. On the casino referendum, opposition was highest in Central and North with 75 percent opposed, compared to 58 percent opposed in South Florida.

According to the hypothesis, residents in South Florida were expected to overestimate majority support for the lottery and underestimate majority opposition to casinos, compared to the other two regions. Figure 5 presents coorientational values by geographic region. The three regions show very similar patterns on both the lottery and casino questions. The majority in each region slightly overestimated the minority; the minority in all three regions underestimated the majority. Again, the hypotheses are not supported; moreover, there is little indication of support for the "observation of the immediate environment" argument that led to them. The patterns suggest that projection may offer more explanatory power than an observation argument.

That may become clearer in Table 3, which looks at accuracy conventionally rather than as co-orientational accuracy. The table presents the election results for the state and by region, the poll results for the state and by region, and the mean, mode and median estimates of the vote for majority and for minority on the two issues. Estimates, particularly modal responses, are in the direction of congruency or projection, compared to true values.

The third hypothesis predicted different patterns based upon the editorial responses taken by newspapers read by respondents. As with the lack of different geographic patterns, actual events in the environment did not generate the conditions necessary for clean tests of the hypothesis. There were not enough readers of pro-casino papers to permit testing, for instance. Only four relatively small newspapers among Florida's dailies endorsed casinos. Most of the others took an anti-casino editorial stance.

A more testable breakdown occurred in regard to lotteries (Fig. 6). Among the newspapers mentioned by respondents, 12 took pro-lottery stances and 16 took anti-lottery stances. Others either took no stance or were identified as "waffling;" that is, they gave no direct advice on how they wanted readers to vote. Again the pattern holds: among both sets of readers, the majority was accurate about the minority proportions; the minority substantially underestimated the true majority. Moreover, something like a "control group" of non-readers showed the same collective pattern. The third hypothesis joins the others in failing the test.

A final set of figures show the patterns when responses are categorized by how respondents implicitly perceived "most people" as agree/disagree or favor/oppose (Figure 7). Those values are calculated as the proportion of the pro-lottery majority guessing less than 50 percent of the vote as pro-lottery.

for example; or the proportion of the anti-casino majority guessing more than 50 percent as pro-casino.

Those figures allow comparisons of values that exclude and include DK responses. Those who said exactly 50 percent -- that is, no true majority -- are excluded from the proportions. When the base is only those who did perceive a majority, either accurately or inaccurately, the casino issue shows the expected pseudo-consensus pattern. When the base is all respondents, "looking glass" patterns are again prevalent, all sides seeing more support for their position than actually exists.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this paper was to to describe a coorientational framework for public opinion research that would go beyond the "mere aggregation" of individual opinions. To do that, we argued, surveys of opinion should include questions about perceived public opinion as well as an individual's own opinion. Such "meta-level" questions provide the minimal data to look at systemic public opinion from several perspectives, including pluralistic ignorance or the spiral of silence.

The actual field conditions under which data were gathered did not result in the ideal situations needed for clean tests in areas we were interested in: comparison of different collective systems, comparisons of different issues and comparisons across time.

Across time, despite having a survey project with independent surveys at three time points, questions about vote estimates were asked only in October. At the earlier points, various groups were engaged in legal maneuverings that might have kept either the casino or lottery referenda off the ballot, so it was deemed inappropriate to ask about a ballot item that in May and August was still somewhat problematic. That also led to a decision to ask about individual opinion in terms of favoring or opposing casinos and lotteries, rather than voting choice. Question phrasing for the final survey was kept consistent with earlier surveys, despite the fact that the legal maneuverings had been settled by that point. Pragmatically, investigation of changes over time in this setting would probably not have been too fruitful. Results showed little change over time in patterns of support or opposition.

Field conditions also were not ideal for comparing collective systems, either in terms of geographic region or shared newspaper readership. Voters in all regions of the state supported lotteries and opposed casinos. The only comparisons possible were based on the magnitude of differences in support

and opposition, not direction, which would have offered the more interesting comparisons.

Our best conditions came from comparisons of two referenda issues, one approved and one rejected. From an argument based on a hypothesized systemic conservative bias, we had expected to find evidence of pseudo-consensus when the majority opposes change and pluralistic ignorance when the majority favors it. Instead we found consistent projection.

It is of course disappointing to fail to find evidence in support of hypotheses we formulated, although we concede that those hypotheses were contrived to emphasize systemic rather than individual level approaches. The pattern of results, however, suggest that individual differences may be much more important than we were willing to concede at the outset.

The "looking glass" does appear to be relatively pervasive. The degree of inaccuracy exhibited by the minority can be attributed largely to projection. And the more accurate majority can as readily be explained by projection as by accurate observation of the social setting. None of the collective coorientation states -- consensus, pseudo-consensus, pluralistic ignorance -- seem to be common. What does seem typical are states of high congruency all the way around.

Phrasing of "meta-opinion" questions may require particular care. Respondents must not only understand the question, but the range of response categories as well. Knowing whether respondents are thinking in terms of a total mix of opinion, or only in terms of yes/no proportions becomes crucial in selecting the base for calculating "true" values and the subsequent standard for accuracy tests.

The solution probably lies in the field rather than in the model's calculations. Perhaps the field question could be phrased something like this: Ignoring those with no opinion and thinking only of those who do have an opinion, what percent of people would you guess favor X position?" The point is that both researcher and respondent must share the same understanding about how don't knows are to be treated.

We would hope that more surveys would ask about respondent perceptions of public opinion, since that is the only way to build up an inventory of data to compare across systems, issues or time. Moreover, we suggest that the most useful question phrasing is to ask for percentage estimates, rather than whether "most" people agree/disagree or favor/oppose. The latter lead to artificial and non-intuitive calculation of meta values.

Figure 1: Collective Coorientation

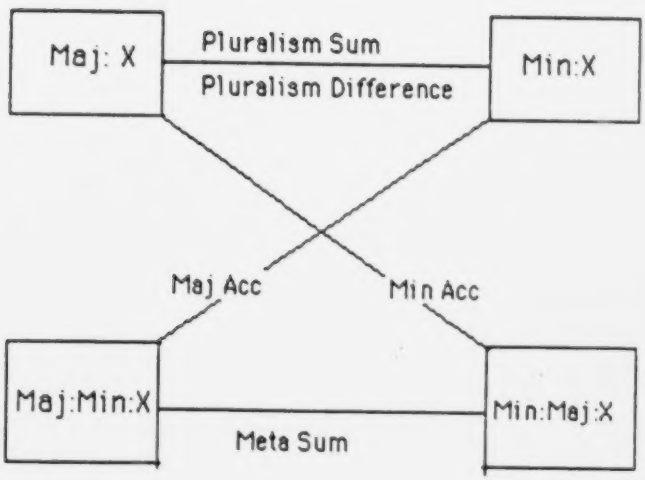
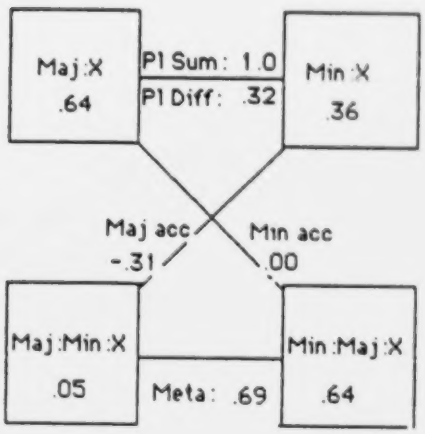


Figure 2: Ky Tax and Lottery (DKs excluded)

2A: Tax Issue; N = 590



2B: Lottery Issue; N = 486

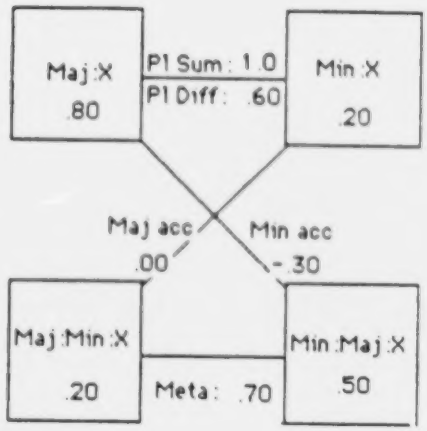


Figure 3: Ky Tax and Lottery
(DKs incorporated in base)

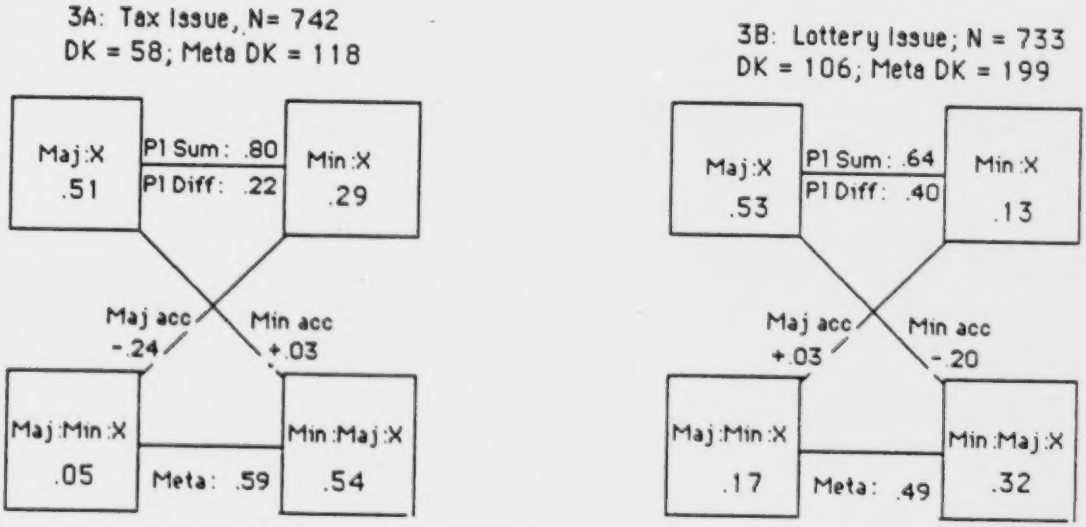


Figure 4: ~~Fig~~ FI Lottery and Casino
(DKs excluded)

Figure 4A: Lottery, N = 493

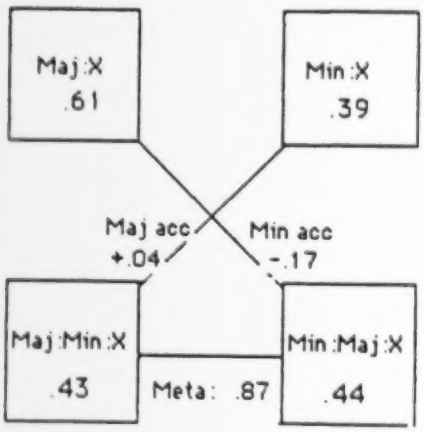


Figure 4B; Casino; N = 498

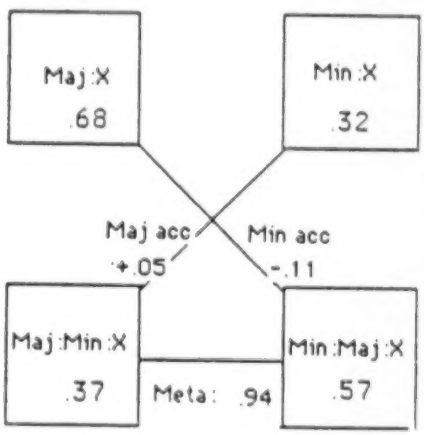


Fig 5: Lottery and Casino for Geographic Regions

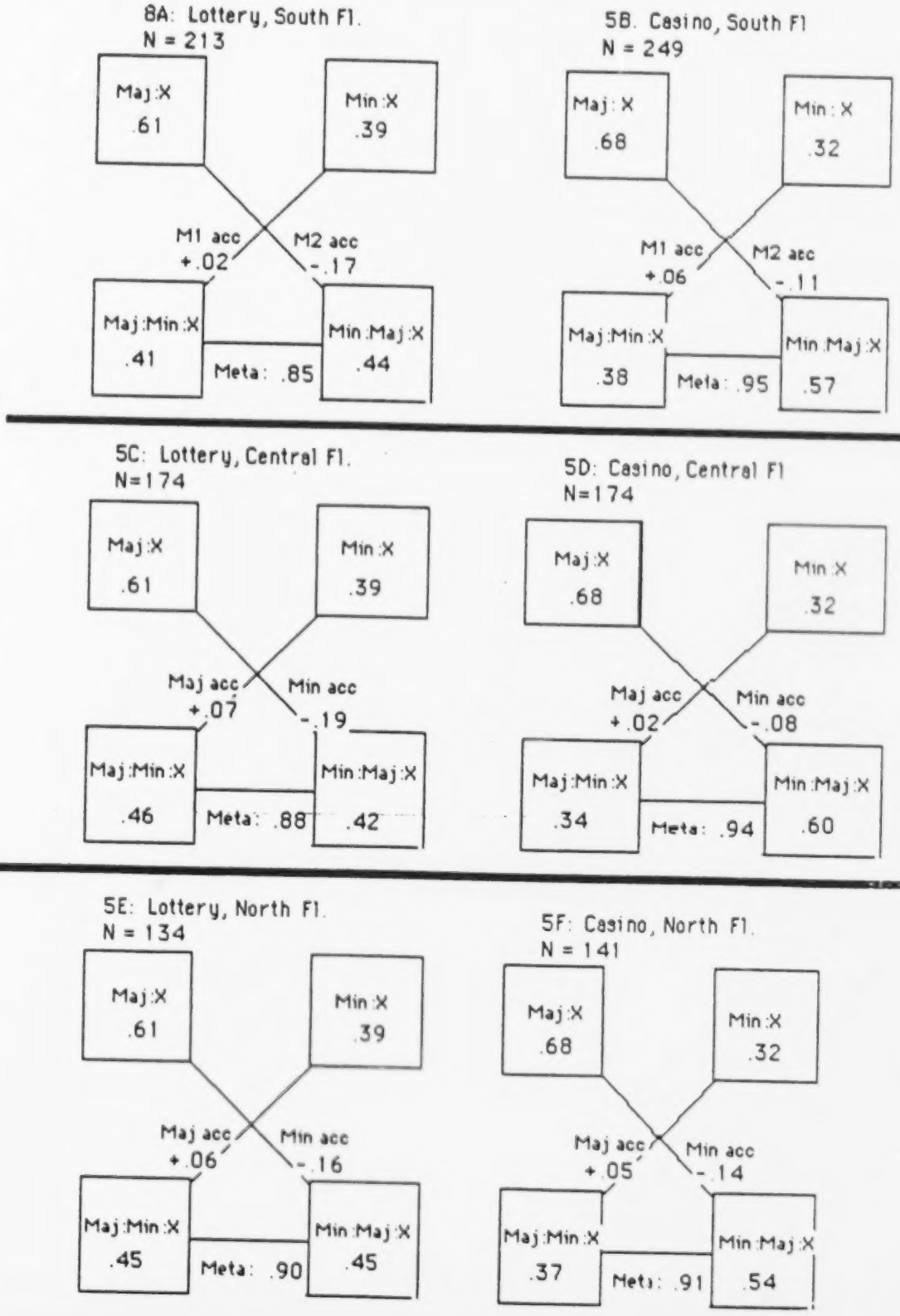


Figure 6: Fl Lottery/ Newspaper Readers Groups

Figure 6A: Readers of Pro-Lottery Editorial Papers; N = 197

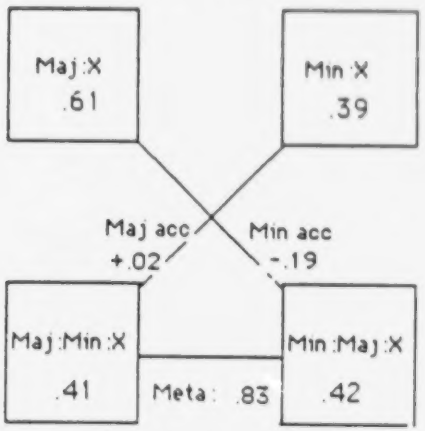


Figure 6B, Readers of Anti-Lottery Editorial Papers, N = 273

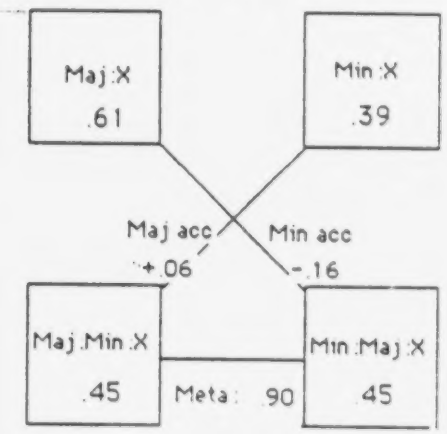


Figure 6C: Non-Subscribers N = 57

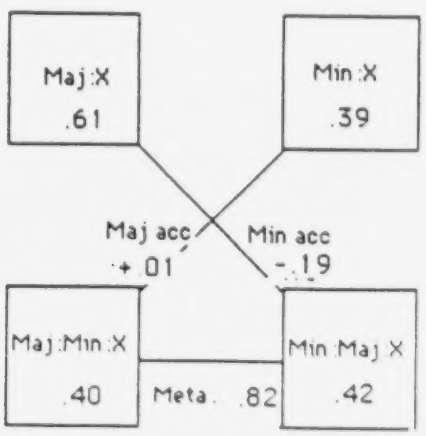


Figure 7: "Most People" Estimates

Figure 7A: Lottery,
DK Excluded, N = 416

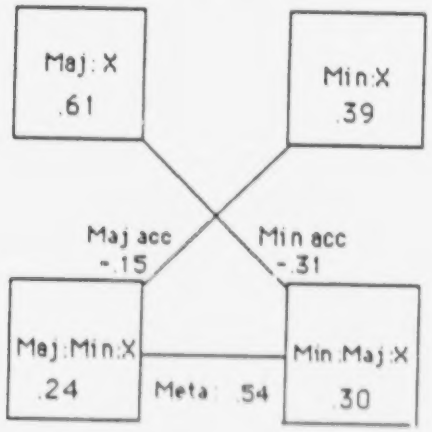


Figure 7B: Casino
DK Excluded, N = 386

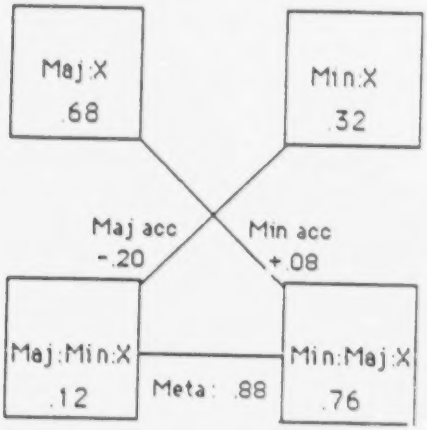


Figure 7C: Lottery,
DK Incoporated, N = 525

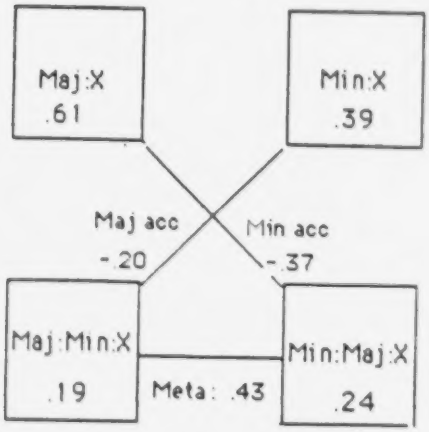


Figure 7D: Casino,
DK Incorporated, N = 531

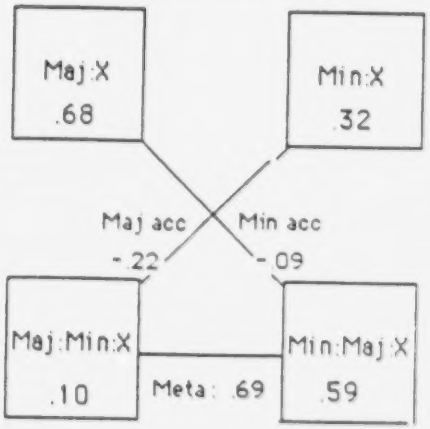


TABLE 1: FREQUENCIES FOR KY LOTTERY AND TAX QUESTIONS

QA: There's been a lot of discussion lately about a state lottery for Kentucky. How closely have you followed this issue .. would you say a lot, somewhat, a little, or not at all?

A lot	131	17.7%
Somewhat	181	24.5%
A little	215	29.1%
Not at all	202	27.3%
Don't know	10	1.4%
Not Asked	4	--

QB: Do you generally favor or oppose starting a state lottery for Kentucky?

Favor	475	64.3%
Oppose	156	21.1%
Don't know	108	14.6%
Refused	3	--
Not asked	1	--

QC: Do you think most people in the state favor or oppose starting a state lottery for Kentucky?

Favor	390	52.9%
Oppose	145	19.7%
Don't know	202	27.4%
Not asked	6	--

QD: Currently, state law in Kentucky limits school systems to a four percent increase in their budgets each year from property taxes. To go beyond a four percent increase, they must hold a special election. If your school system decided to hold an election, would you probably vote for a higher tax rate or against it.

For higher tax	254	34.2%
Against	431	58.0%
Don't Know	58	7.8%

QE: How do you think most people in your community would vote?

For higher tax	108	14.6%
Against	516	69.5%
Don't know	118	15.9%
Refused	1	--

TABLE 2: FREQUENCIES FOR FLORIDA LOTTERY AND CASINO QUESTIONS

QA: Do you favor a state-run lottery designed to help fund public education?

Yes	373	56.0%
No	212	31.8%
Undecided	19	2.9%
Unfished int.	50	7.5%
Don't know	9	1.4%
No answer	3	.4%

QB: What percentage of the voters would you guess will vote for the lottery in the November 4th election?

Less than 33%	60	9%
33 to 49%	109	16%
50%	86	13%
51 to 66%	172	26%
Over 66%	86	13%
Unfinished int.	118	18%
Don't know	22	3%
No answer	13	2%

QC: Do you favor casino gambling in counties that choose to have it?

Yes	172	28.5%
No	417	69.2%
Undecided	14	2.1%
Unfinished int.	52	7.8%
Don't know	8	1.2%
No answer	3	.5%

QD: What percentage of the voters would you guess will vote for casino gambling in the November 4th election?

Less than 33%	187	28%
33 to 49%	174	25%
50%	79	12%
51 to 66%	48	7%
Over 66%	23	4%
Unfinished int.	117	18%
Don't know	21	3%
No answer	17	3%

TABLE 3: ELECTION RESULTS, SURVEY RESULTS AND RESPONDENT ESTIMATES OF VOTE

	ELECTION	SURVEY			
			Mean estimate	Mode estimate	Median estimate
PRO CASINO					
State	32%	29%			
Anti			37	30	35
Pro			43	50	45
South	43%	33%			
Anti			38	50	40
Pro			43	50	45
Central	25%	25%			
Anti			34	30	35
Pro			40	40	40
North	25%	28%			
Anti			37	40	40
Pro			46	50	45
PRO LOTTERY					
State	61%	64%			
Anti			57	60	60
Pro			44	41	40
South	76%	73%			
Anti			59	60	60
Pro			44	41	49
Central	57%	57%			
Anti			54	60	56
Pro			42	40	40
North	53%	57%			
Anti			55	60	55
Pro			45	40	43

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END NOTES

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[2]This quote might have referred to several politicians or incidents in U.S. history. The context for this specific quote was "the Gary Hart fiasco," as described by James Boyle in a "My Turn" column for Newsweek, May 25, 1987, p. 8. The column was entitled "Voyeurism in Politics." Boyle was described as "a Scotsman" and "professor of law at American University s Washington College of Law.

[3]A complete discussion of the methodology is available in "Final Technical Report: 1986 Public Opinion Polls for Palm Beach Newspapers, Inc." from the University of Florida Communication Research Center.